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## SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY.<sup>1</sup>

IN order to compare two sciences, to distinguish their relations, it is necessary in the beginning to give each of them a precise definition. As to political economy we may accept the current definition: political economy is the science of wealth—the science of the processes of production, circulation, distribution and consumption of material objects useful to human life. We remark immediately, however, that in this definition we consider political economy as a science only, not as an art. This discrimination of economic science from economic art is familiar. Science is the study of facts as they are. Art is an effort to organize things as we wish them to be. Art and science to be sure both speak of laws, but with this difference. For science, laws are, according to the formula of Montesquieu, “necessary relations which spring from the nature of things.” They are formulas, derived by induction, which sum up the relations of coëxistence and of succession found to be constant in the facts studied. For art, on the contrary, laws are *a priori* precepts, which claim domination over all application and all practice. Hence laws are for science the goal, for art the point of departure.

<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper appends the following note: “The present essay is an outcome of a discussion upon the relations of sociology and political economy, which took place at the session of the Paris Society of Political Economy, June 5, 1894. Part was taken in the discussion by MM. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, Emile Levasseur, Frederic Passy and others. In what I said I was tempted to repeat certain ideas which I had already expressed in the *Revue de Sociologie* (1893, Nos. 1 and 5). Those who have done me the honor to read those articles will easily perceive that even upon these points I have introduced certain new considerations.”

The paper appeared in the *Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, vol. ii. No. 6. We translate it not because we agree with its restriction of the scope of sociology on the constructive side, but because it represents the thought of an important group of scholars in France upon a subject which must be debated for some time yet before permanent agreement is reached. The author, whom we are glad to introduce to our readers, is an official of the French bureau of commerce and industry, general secretary of the *Institute Internationale de Sociologie*, and the director of the *Revue Internationale de Sociologie*.

Moreover, the laws of science and those of art cannot have the same form, since the former only demonstrate, while the latter prescribe. To give concrete examples, the following is a scientific law, because it is the simple identification of a fact; viz., that man always seeks to attain a maximum of result with a minimum of effort. In the proper domain of political economy there are scientific laws, such as the law of supply and demand (goods are always dearer when the demand is great and the supply small); such as Gresham's law (bad money drives out the good); such as the law of Jean-Baptiste Say (products always find a market easiest when they are most abundant and most varied); such as the law of Ricardo (the rent of land tends to constant increase); such as the law of Malthus (population tends to increase in geometrical progression, food in arithmetical).<sup>1</sup>

Again there is, on the other hand, a law of art; such, for example, as the well-known law of morals: "do to others as you would that they should do to you;" or the precept of Kant: "treat man as an end not as a means;" or the maxim of the physiocrats: "*laissez faire, laissez passer*." The laws of science and those of art may bear upon the same subject-matter. It is most desirable indeed that upon all social questions accumulated observation shall at last be transformed into scientific laws from which precepts of art may then be immediately derived.

For example, if constant and uninterrupted experience should demonstrate that the application of free-trade measures is every where followed by improvement in general welfare, this would then become a scientific law. From it we might draw without hesitation a precept of art, viz., that free trade should every where be adopted. But even here, in accordance with this hypothesis which I have purposely made as favorable as possible to the reconciliation of science and art, there will always remain between them this difference, that the one is limited to discourse of that which is and has been; while the other may

<sup>1</sup> These laws are to be sure not all finally established. At all events they have the form, the exterior aspect, if not the substance of scientific laws.

control that which is to be; the first speaks in the indicative mood, the second in the imperative.

If I have believed it necessary to insist upon this distinction between art and science, it is because the distinction once made wonderfully simplifies the task which I have undertaken. Economic science, according to this distinction, is the study of the facts pertaining to the production, the circulation, the distribution and the consumption of wealth, and also of the laws which emerge from these facts. Economic art, on the other hand, is a body of precepts relating to a possible better form of organizing these different phenomena. Political economy reaches its completion only in combination of these two orders of research.<sup>1</sup>

Sociology, on the other hand, understood not in the popular sense but in the acceptance fixed by the usage of its most eminent exponents, does not present this duality. Sociology is a science only, the general science of societies. It does not wish to be an art, since researches of the scientific order are enough to occupy the sociologists; and practical applications, to be fruitful, must be reserved until later. It is true that, even thus limited, the field open to the sociologist's efforts remains immense.

That which the sociologist has to study is not merely, as in the case of the economist, the facts and the laws pertaining to wealth; it is the totality of societary phenomena. The sociologist must pass in review all societies and all the classes of facts

<sup>1</sup> The economists often take the words "science" and "art" in a different sense. They mean by "economic science" at the same time: (1) the study of real economic phenomena (which is the sense in which we should use the term); (2) the determination of the economic ideal (which constitutes what we call economic art). They call "economic art" the accommodation of this ideal to times and circumstances (which is in our view simply the affair of practical economy). They say that all this is merely a question of words. Doubtless, but the words are important. It seems to us entirely incorrect to confound under one title (that of "economic science") two things as different as the study of real facts and the search for the ideal. For even when it is thought that the ideal is to let things follow their natural course, there is still a radical difference between the speculative interest which attaches itself to the real and the practical interest which seeks for the better.

which they present. The rational order of his studies is the following: It is necessary for him first to study the human groups one by one. In each of them he examines (following the terminology of the naturalists) in the first place the anatomy, in the second place the physiology. He observes the physical environment in which the society under consideration lives, the men who compose it, the race to which they belong, the groups (families, associations, cities) into which they are divided—in a word the anatomy of the social body. Passing to the physiology, the sociologist proposes the question—What phenomena take place in this society? The biologist distinguishes in the individual being a life of nutrition, a life of reproduction, a life of relation. Likewise, with the collective existence, the sociologist will distinguish a life of nutrition, precisely represented by economic phenomena; a life of reproduction, consisting of the genetic phenomena; and a life of relation, which gives birth to morality, art, religion and science.

Thus far, however, nothing has been examined but the life of individuals considered in their relations with each other. The life of the entire state as a whole, considered in itself, as an organism at once collective and individual, is superimposed upon these individual lives. This civic life is made up of political phenomena. As to juridical phenomena, they are, so to speak, only the crystallization of different orders of precedent phenomena, the common form which facts economic, moral, religious, political gradually receive, when, losing their primitive plasticity, they accommodate themselves to the rigid forms of written laws.

In brief, the study of these different orders of phenomena constitutes the physiology of a society. But when the sociologist has prosecuted this dual study, anatomical and physiological, for a given society, it is then necessary for him to do the same thing with all other societies. And when he has so surveyed them all, there remains the task of synthesizing the collected data. He must proceed from the anatomy and physiology of each society to the comparative anatomy and the comparative phys-

iology of societies in general. The elaboration of these sciences, descriptive anatomy and physiology on the one hand being so extensive, and comparative anatomy and physiology being so precise, would truly be impossible for the sociologist if he had not the assistance of the most valuable auxiliaries. On the one hand the historians properly so called assume the duty of making for him the needed descriptions of societies individually considered. On the other hand the economists, the scholars who busy themselves with comparative law, with the history of religions, of art, of moral ideas, or who criticise political constitutions, all these perform a work of systematization upon the data collected with reference to these different orders of facts. The sociologist then limits himself to drawing from these labors and coördinating the most general results. On the one side, social organisms being studied, he has only to classify them and to distinguish the type of each of the groups which they form, according to the complexity of its structure and of its functions. On the other side, the social facts of each species being known, with their proper laws, the sociologist has only to study the action and reaction of each of these species of facts upon all the others, and to discover the general rules of the evolution of all these phenomena in combination. In a word, his task may thus be restricted to the construction of the general types of societies (or the synthesis of descriptive sociology) and to induction of the higher laws of social forms and functions (the synthesis of comparative sociology). Yet it is evident that, however it may be restricted, the sociologist's task demands enormous labor, and that there is scarcely any present scientific task of which the results might be more fruitful, or of which the accomplishment would be more difficult.

Political economy and sociology being thus defined and placed in contrast with each other, let us now ask what services they may mutually render. And in the first place, what is exactly the contribution of political economy to sociology.

We do not hesitate to assert that the construction of the

science of political economy has alone made it possible for us to dream of constructing sociology. As we have seen, sociology is the *scientific* study of social facts considered in their generality. But who were the first to study social facts scientifically? The economists. In all departments of human activity, practice, that is *art* of a rudimentary sort, has preceded science. There was cultivation of the soil before there was botany, there was breeding of animals before there was an attempt at zoölogy. But the practical pursuits of agriculture and the breeding of animals led to scientific study of the nature of plants and animals. It has not been different with the social sciences. Practice and a kind of art are in this sphere also very old. In all times there have been diverse views which have presided as a sort of authority over the regulation of labor, or over the levying of customs; precepts of conduct have been furnished to men by laws, by religion, by the morality accepted in their country; there have been general political maxims followed by rulers. All this usually amounts to nothing but a rudimentary *praxis*; when certain general rules emerge, we may say that an *art* exists. We cannot say that so far there is *science*, since what was desired by those who laid down these rules was to produce by the application of them certain social phenomena conformed to their subjective ideas, not a knowledge of social phenomena as they occur spontaneously in the actual environment of the rule-makers.

How then is social science born? If we except Aristotle, whose teaching upon this point cannot be reviewed, and certain moralists like La Bruyère or La Rochefoucauld, who occupied themselves less with formulating doctrines than with observing, we may say that the economists were the first to try, within a particular department of activity, to develop a science of certain social facts. It is in the work of Boisguillebert upon *le Detail de France* (a most significant title), that we find the original attempt to realize this new idea. To speak generally, the economists in advance of all others realized that by the side of human laws, due to the more or less arbitrary will of an occasional legislator, there exist natural laws, which are not the work of any

individual, but which impose themselves upon all men, and which, whether men will or no, govern the composition, the functional action and the evolution of societies. To distinguish such of these laws as pertain to wealth is the natural aim of economic science.

But it is upon this conception of natural laws that sociology must build, since sociology—science and not art, we repeat again—is the study of the different aspects under which the activity of men living in society naturally manifests itself. In order that this study might be possible it was necessary that the idea of natural laws should become distinct in turn in connection with the facts of organization and of evolution, moral, religious, intellectual, political and even juridical. It is only in our time that this conception has become clear in all these domains successively,—hence the science of sociology is so young. Moreover, in order that this notion of natural law should emerge in these different domains it was necessary that it should come from a contiguous territory. It was from political economy that the notion was imported and consequently to the economists belongs the honor of having laid the first foundations of the general science of societies.

It must be further said that political economy has not simply furnished to sociology the general abstract idea of scientific law. It has done more. It has contributed to sociology certain of its own laws, which are found to apply not merely among the facts pertaining to wealth, but among all social facts. The most important of these laws is that of division of labor. To Adam Smith this was the great law of the production of wealth. Herbert Spencer went further and pointed out that this law controls all the evolution of all social machinery. He showed that it operates in the case of the political, the religious, the juridical organization of societies, that in every case, when these organs develop they divide into different sections, and that each assumes exclusively a part of the work which was at first performed by the whole organism. The same law manifests itself in biology, where the multiplication of organs is always accompanied by their differentiation. Thus Spencer was able to say that in all activities we see the



homogeneous passing into the heterogeneous, or more exactly, for we may thus express his complete formula, we see emerging from confused, chaotic homogeneity, where nothing is distinct, coordinated heterogeneity, where each element has its proper function in relation and in harmony with the functions of the related elements. An economic law has thus become one of the fundamental principles of general sociology.

But even where economic science has not yet gone so far as to establish laws, where it must at present be content with determining facts, these data, such as they are, have none the less great utility for sociology. Economic facts are, in a word, the foundation of the other social facts. The truth of this is easily perceived. In the individual it is nutrition that makes possible reproduction and thought. In society it is the same. Genetic facts, facts psychical in all their forms,—moral, religious, æsthetic, scientific, even political and juridical—exist only by virtue of force which issues from the utilization of wealth. Hence the economic régime of a society impresses itself upon all the remainder of its constitution—upon its genetic constitution, as in the case of the institutional bond between wealth and birth; upon its intellectual constitution, according to the mode of life of a people, whether nomadic or settled, militant or peaceful, predatory or pastoral or agricultural; upon its juridical constitution, it is needless to say that the laws relating to property and its partition, to contracts, to successions, reflect the necessities of existence among the nations for which they were made; finally, upon its political constitution, for these same conditions have much to do with the governmental type adopted, whether monarchy, aristocracy or democracy. In a word these economic facts mark with their impress all other social facts. It is consequently essential to the sociologist that he shall understand these economic facts to begin with, since he cannot otherwise understand any of the other facts which he has to study. And if even the economist can furnish these facts only in the crude state, that is without having succeeded in determining their laws, they are still valuable for the sociologist, for in observing the reactions of the

economic facts upon other social activities, the sociologist may come to comprehend the real type to which they belong, the radical law of their correlation and of their evolution, and he may be able in his turn to teach the economist.

We come therefore to inquire, after recognizing the services of economic science to general sociology, what services this latter science may render to the former? These services appear to us to be of two kinds. In the first place the influence of sociology seems to us fitted to lead to improvement in the method of inquiry in economic science. In the second place the facts examined by the sociologist appear to us to be of a nature to throw a peculiar light upon many of the phenomena which the economist observes.

Let us notice, in the first place, the action of the sociological spirit upon economic method. It is fundamental to sociology to desire to embrace all societies in all times and in all places. It attaches great importance to social origins, to questions pertaining to the primitive form of the family and of property. It examines the negroes of Africa, the savages of Oceanica, the red races, the Turanian or Semitic tribes, the ancient Aryan *gentes*, with as much interest and profit as the most refined modern civilizations. Economic science, on the contrary, seems to have confined itself somewhat too exclusively, up to date, to the study of facts which occur within the great societies among which we live. We may and we must hope that the influence of the sociological spirit will lead to correction of this narrowness of view, to an interest in economic phenomena in all races and in all environments, to the conception that there are other forms of production, circulation and distribution of wealth than those which we see every day. This will apparently be a great advantage to science, for, in the first place, these inferior civilizations deserve to be known not less than others; a fact, wherever it occurs and however humble it may be, is always a fact and has a claim to be taken into account in every scientific synthesis which purports to be complete. Still further, in order to comprehend

our own societies it is necessary to understand rudimentary societies, for our civilization developed out of their barbarism and their savagery; our social organizations have passed through phases which are recalled by those with which these rude societies stopped developing. If we wish to explain our actual modern states, we must study ancient states, and also the inferior contemporary groups which they resemble in so many particulars. It is only by exact knowledge of the past that we can interpret the present and look into the future.

Nor is this all. Sociology is not content to study all societies, but it proposes to study all classes of social facts in all of these societies. Now the mission of economic science is to examine only a single kind of facts. But it would be very useful to the economist to be able to find in another science a résumé of the totality of facts contiguous to those which he makes his specialty. This is precisely the service which sociology ought to render. The economic function, which corresponds in society with the function of nutrition in the individual, is without doubt the most rudimentary function, the basis of all others. Nevertheless, if we wish to comprehend its functional action it is necessary to know in addition the structure of the social body in which this function operates—just as to understand the nutrition of an animal it is necessary to know its individual anatomy. Now, as we have seen, sociology occupies itself in the beginning with determining the anatomy of the society studied, with describing its double environment—the external or physical environment (soil, climate, minerals, flora and fauna), and the internal or human environment (race, population, subordinate human groups). But further, after the economic function come the other functions which we have already enumerated—genetic, moral, religious, political, etc. If these are in a sense derived from the first, it is evident also that once differentiated they acquire an existence of their own, and that they react upon the economic phenomena—just as, in the individual, thought, while posterior to nutrition, exercises upon the latter an indisputable influence. It is thus, for example, that the moral ideas of

a people have an important bearing upon the form which consumption assumes; that their juridical system rests upon their production; that in the partition of wealth there may be traced the action of the political organization. Economic phenomena, being thus subjected to the influence of manifold causes of another order, cannot be explained without examination of all the other orders of societary facts. There exists a solidarity among all the manifestations of social life, and on this account it is necessary to establish a solidarity among all the social sciences. This idea is making its way more and more into the thought of investigators in all countries. It is, in fact, only the recognition of the intimate bond—I might almost say the bond of subordination—which logically attaches economic science to general sociology.

Sociology being a science, we have only desired to present it in its relations to economic *science*. In closing it is in place to indicate in a few words that sociology should have an equally beneficial influence upon economic *art*. In extending the field of our researches, in showing us that economic phenomena occur elsewhere in a manner entirely different from ours, sociology will perhaps make us see that the remedies for social evils, the precepts which it will be advantageous to follow in social reforms, should themselves be multifold and should vary with circumstances, times and places. It will at least show that in case a mode of organization has been found good in one place and at a given date, it by no means follows that the same should immediately be put into operation elsewhere without previous careful investigation to determine whether the circumstances are essentially different. Sociology will thus rid political economy of that tempting but impractical dogmatism which has often been its reproach. It will show that this art as well as others must be not dogmatic but experimental. Still more, in making clear that by the side of economic phenomena there occur in society a multitude of others which exert upon each other incessant actions and reactions, it demonstrates

that legislative intervention, a modification of the natural order of phenomena, is always a serious affair; that, in short, we cannot touch a single cell of the social organism, however minute it may be, without affecting all the rest; that the least derangement produces repercussion at every point throughout the environment; that, consequently, before experimenting with a reform, of whatever order it may be, there should be most attentive inquiry as to the sort of consequences which it may bring in its train, throughout series of phenomena that may be very remote in appearance.

From all this the conclusion will be derived that important and lasting modifications are to be expected not from a sudden overthrow, however well meaning may have been its authors, but from the natural course of things, from the proper life of the social organism, which in the long run, like the individual organism, knows how to adapt itself in the best possible way to its environment.

This detailed study of the nature of the social world will result in giving us an increasingly high regard for this nature, in making us comprehend how majestic is its energy, and how feeble in comparison are the powers of individuals or of associated men; in arousing confidence in the spontaneous evolution of societies, and in awakening incredulity toward revolutions which propose to accelerate this evolution more rapidly than is possible, or which even plan to prevail against it by leading us back to a social state which history, the most impartial of judges, has once for all condemned.

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